



Introduction to the inaugural issue: Celebrating 30 years of AAUSC publications

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The title of this introduction is somewhat oxymoronic: We inaugurate *Second Language Research & Practice* and at the same time celebrate a 30-year history of publishing. Yet what connects these two events is the [American Association of University Supervisors, Coordinators, and Directors of Language Programs](#), more commonly known as the AAUSC. As the preface to this issue explains, the AAUSC has been publishing scholarship on language program direction since 1990, first through its annual volume, *Issues in Language Program Direction*, and now through its online, open-access journal, *Second Language Research & Practice*. Appropriately, then, this inaugural journal issue both takes stock of the past and looks to the future. In it are six articles summarizing findings and setting the research agenda on important topics from past annual volumes and nine descriptive reports recounting lived experiences during the COVID-19 crisis and their relationship to language learning and program direction.

This milestone marks a number of shifts. First, and most obviously, the association is no longer publishing an annual print volume and instead has embraced the world of online, open-access scholarship. This was a deliberate choice by the AAUSC Editorial Board to increase the publication's scholarly impact, reach a broader readership, provide consistency over the production process, increase indexing possibilities, and embrace open access in a time when more universities are severing ties with large journal publishers. The second shift is related to the scope of the AAUSC publication. Past annual volumes were thematic in nature, targeting issues pertinent to language program direction such as innovative pedagogies, program articulation, and teacher development. Over the years, this thematic focus presented a number of constraints, not the least of which was soliciting an adequate number of submissions to ensure high-quality chapters. *Second Language Research & Practice*, therefore, is not thematic in scope. Instead, each issue disseminates scholarship on a range of topics relevant to postsecondary language education and program direction from theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives. In addition, the journal is inclusive of diverse professional backgrounds, including tenure- and non-tenure-track faculty and graduate students; aimed at researchers and practitioners across the disciplinary spectrum; and representative of a wide range of languages. Finally, with the move from an annual print volume to an online journal, we also shift to a new publisher. After an amicable 30-year relationship with Heinle/Cengage, AAUSC has now forged a relationship with the [National Foreign Language Research Center \(NFLRC\)](#) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, publisher of two additional open-access journals, *Language Learning & Technology* and *Reading in a Foreign Language*. Moreover, the association is partnering with five other nationally recognized language centers: the [Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition \(CARLA\)](#) at the University of Minnesota; the [Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language, and Literacy \(CERCLL\)](#) at the University of Arizona; the [Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning \(COERLL\)](#) at the University of Texas at Austin; the [Second Language Teaching and Resource Center \(L2TRC\)](#) at the University of Utah; and the [Open Language Resource Center \(OLRC\)](#) at the University of Kansas. Through

these partnerships, we are able to support the journal's production and more broadly disseminate our scholarship.

The shift away from thematic issues reflects a broadening in the profession's thinking about language teaching and learning. In particular, theories of second language acquisition have expanded to reflect not only cognitive but also social epistemologies, and approaches to teaching reflect calls for curricular integration rather than division between language and literary-cultural content. The impact of past thematic volumes of *Issues in Language Program Direction* is nonetheless undeniable, and the purpose of this inaugural issue of *Second Language Research & Practice* is to celebrate that impact. Indeed, the broad topic of bridging the language-content divide has served as a leitmotif across the 30-year history of AAUSC publications, regardless of a volume's theme or an author's theoretical orientation. For instance, several past volumes addressed the themes of advancedness and curricular coherence, which are central to arguments against the language-content divide. The related theme of the state of postsecondary language programs was also prevalent in past AAUSC volumes, particularly in the 1990s. These volumes highlighted challenges resulting from the language-content divide and internal and external changes affecting language programs. Language development and teacher professionalization were also recurring themes across the 30-year history of *Issues in Language Program Direction*, with six volumes specifically addressing these topics. These volumes share in common a focus on complexity (of grammar and vocabulary acquisition, of teacher learning) and innovation (in instructional practices, in professional development experiences). Innovation is a subtheme in three additional volumes that present perspectives on technology-enhanced teaching and learning. The 1997 volume was particularly innovative in predicting the future impact of new technologies on language teaching and learning; this impact is reflected in subsequent volumes on internet-mediated intercultural learning and hybrid language instruction. Additional cutting-edge themes from past volumes include articulation within and beyond the language program, assessment and evaluation, individual differences and speakership, and study abroad. Most recently, thematic volumes honed in on the critical and social pedagogies arising from the social turn that has changed the direction of applied linguistics research. These volumes present theory-rich responses to questions of diversity, classroom-based learning, and paradigm change.

As the range of volume themes attests, AAUSC publications—with contributions from both experienced and emerging scholars—have advanced national discussions related to language education, with implications not only for lower-level language programs, but also for the undergraduate curriculum as a whole. Nonetheless, postsecondary language programs still face important challenges and *Second Language Research & Practice* will continue the tradition of addressing them through cutting-edge scholarship. Indeed, the challenges outlined in the first volume of *Issues in Language Program Direction*, published in 1990, remain today: how best to articulate language programs; how to enhance and professionalize the work of the language program director; how to effectively prepare teachers; and how to create and implement pedagogical materials that advance student learning. The first six articles in this inaugural journal issue address many of these challenges. Each is focused on one theme from past annual volumes and aims to take stock of current knowledge and set the research agenda moving forward as we enter this new era of AAUSC publications.

These six contributions highlight the rapidly changing landscape of postsecondary language programs in relation to the social turn in applied linguistics and a socio-cognitively constructed view of language learning. In particular, explorations of the individual learner, learner proficiency profiles, language departments as complex dynamic systems, open online educational resources, speakership, and multiliteracies pedagogy in teacher education all evoke the theme of fostering human capabilities through language learning. The contributions also represent a certain tension faced by language programs and language program directors (LPDs) between the social turn in second language acquisition (SLA) research, which considers language learning a social and cultural phenomenon, and the importance of emphasizing individual learners' autonomy. Importantly, socioculturally and sociolinguistically informed perspectives on language learning connect conceptions such as the digital divide, standard language ideology, and learners' and teachers' identities to issues of equity and social justice.

For their article on “New Perspectives on the Individual Learner: Implications for Research and Teaching,” Carol Klee and Lauren Truman discuss recent research on learner differences that addresses five key issues—age of onset of acquisition, language aptitudes, motivation, emotion, willingness to communicate—with particular attention to studies that are framed by the social turn in SLA and the notion of person-centeredness. Highlighting that individual differences are no longer viewed as distinct or monolithic, but rather are subject to variability, Klee and Truman conclude by emphasizing the relevance of individual learner differences for LPDs who guide instructors, and challenges that the complexities of individual differences present for both instructors and LPDs.

In “The Proficiency Profiles of Language Students: Implications for Programs,” Paula Winke, Xiaowan Zhang, Fernando Rubio, Susan Gass, Daniel Soneson, and Jane Hacking report on a large-scale, cross-sectional proficiency study conducted at three public universities as a means to examine the mission and goals of their language programs. To enhance understanding of undergraduate students’ proficiency in Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish, the study tagged proficiency attainment by various student background factors. The authors draw two main conclusions from their findings. First, students’ proficiency attainment in listening and reading, overall lower than speaking, suggests that lower-level curricular balance and priorities might need to be reexamined. In turn, the elusiveness of advanced proficiency attainment by language majors may be tied to a shift from a communicative framework that emphasizes oral proficiency to a focus on reading skills in upper-level courses. Second, language programs need to contextualize proficiency attainment findings with students’ background information (e.g., previous language learning experiences and degree- or non-degree seeking status) to effectively address questions related to curriculum and instruction.

“An Ecological Approach to Language Pedagogy, Programs, and Departments” by Bridget Swanson and Glenn Levine, building on the premise of a persistent critique (and crisis) of postsecondary language education, conceptualizes language departments as complex dynamic systems instead of bifurcated entities that divide language education into lower and upper levels. After synthesizing key elements of complex dynamic systems theory such as inherent nonlinear change and social and special nestedness, Swanson and Levine suggest that departments should aim at democratization, decolonization, and collaboration beyond departmental boundaries. To reach these goals, the authors propose strategies and policies such as inclusiveness in curricular decision-making and goal-setting; enfranchising learners by establishing new visions for language education; connecting the classroom to the real world; designing and teaching cross-department courses; and engaging students in social outreach activities.

Joshua Thoms, in “Re-envisioning L2 Hybrid and Online Courses as Digital Open Learning and Teaching Environments: Responding to a Changing World,” examines research on blended and online second language courses, including linguistic outcomes, learner autonomy, and issues related to instructors. Noting that work has moved away from comparing online and face-to-face instruction, Thoms characterizes recent scholarship as framed by sociocultural or ecological perspectives, focusing on contextual and social variables in learners’ meaning-making and on learning that takes place outside the confines of a physical classroom. Thoms then links changes in digital learning to the open education movement, which disrupts traditional (and costly) textbook-based language education by relying on open resources and by promoting collaborative pedagogy that engages students in co-construction of syllabi and course content.

In “Redefining Speakership: Implications for Language Program Direction,” Carl Blyth and Amanda Dalola examine, through the lens of speakership, how conceptions of language have evolved in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. Following a review of scholarship, they offer a set of principles, or tenets, about language to fundamentally transform language education. Tracing the evolution of speakership in terms of three successive waves that mirror how sociolinguistic research more broadly has evolved, Blyth and Dalola conclude that (monolingual) speakership in the 20th century was defined by social and geographical variation; in the 21st century, however, speakers are viewed as users of multiple languages who perform styles and construct personae. In a similar vein, conceptualizations of speakership in applied linguistics has moved from linguistic competence of a monolingual native speaker to the notion of authentic

multilingual speakers who make linguistic choices to perform and negotiate identities. To transform language education that is still rooted in traditional structuralist paradigms, the authors articulate five sociolinguistically grounded tenets about language (e.g., language is a remix, language is a means of self-authentication) and then translate them into concrete pedagogical practices.

Finally, the article on “Teacher Development and Multiliteracies Pedagogy: Challenges and Opportunities for Postsecondary Language Programs” by Kate Paesani and Heather Willis Allen points to a need for research focused on teachers’ understanding and implementation of multiliteracies approaches. Their summary of existing scholarship demonstrates that moving teachers from familiar paradigms and practices to the unfamiliar terrain of multiliteracies pedagogy requires a commitment to long-term professional development that acknowledges the complexities of this approach. Though scholars have come to this conclusion, Paesani and Allen also identify shortcomings in the research that prompt them to ask key questions, including how professional development activities impact teachers’ understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy; whether instructional practices change as a result of learning about multiliteracies pedagogy; and how to tailor professional development to different stages of teachers’ learning trajectories. Paesani and Allen conclude by highlighting models and tools that conceptualize and enact professional development as a complex, dynamic, and long-term process.

These six contributions successfully bridge 30 years of scholarship published in the annual AAUSC volumes and the new era of an online open-access AAUSC journal. They represent continuity in that *Second Language Research & Practice*, like the annual volume, will address complex theoretical and practical issues faced by postsecondary language programs and, more broadly, undergraduate curricula. They also highlight the epistemological expansion of our field to include both cognitive and social perspectives on language teaching and learning.

Further underscoring that the profession will grapple with long-standing as well as new and unexpected challenges, the authors of nine descriptive reports tell their personal stories about dealing with a (quite literally) shifting landscape during the COVID-19 crisis. Guest edited by Carl Blyth, former series editor of *Issues in Language Program Direction* and current AAUSC president, these essays represent different levels of the ecology of language departments: Contributors are provosts, deans, chairs, LPDs, and graduate students from a range of institutional contexts (public, private, research, liberal arts). The complexity of this ecology is reflected in the different perspectives each contributor provides to common challenges and successes related to the COVID-19 crisis. These essays were written in June 2020, thus making them part of what feels like the distant past given the rapidly evolving world in which we live. They describe the emergency mode that characterized the shift to remote instruction earlier in the year, yet our current reality is much different and expectations for effectively implementing our programs are higher. These essays thus serve as an archive of a significant moment in time from which we can all learn.

Together, these six research articles and nine descriptive reports launch an inaugural issue of *Second Language Research & Practice* that captures our field as theory-driven, but also intertwined with real-life contexts.

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